

Convent Avenue Baptist Church
Wednesday Bible Study 6/2/10
Pastor Jesse Williams

The Articles of Faith; What we believe...

Article XIV. Baptism and The Lord's Supper

Matthew 3:16; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:37-38; Acts 8:36-39; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:1-6
Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 10:38-39 & 14:22-26; Luke 22:15-20; 1Corinthians 11:23-30;
1Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:11-12

In this article of Faith, we learn that the two primary ordinances of the church are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, otherwise known as Communion. While different denominations may have different views on whether or not other rituals should be included as an ordinance, most Christian denominations agree on these two as the two basic ordinances. We should note that there is a difference between an *ordinance* and a *sacrament* in the language and conversation of the church. A sacrament is generally believed to be a sacred ritual in the church that is connected with some mystical, supernatural power or actual conveyance of grace. In other words, it is believed that just the act of participating in a sacrament literally does something mystical and supernatural in the life of the person who is involved.

By contrast, an *ordinance* is a symbol, and does not incorporate the idea of conveying grace or mystical and supernatural activity. Since an ordinance is a symbol, it has no inherent power to change those who are participating in it, although God can certainly use the act to minister to a person's heart. We believe that Baptism and Communion are ordinances of the church because the water itself does not save people in Baptism; and neither do the bread and wine in Communion. They are symbols and the act of participating in the ordinances symbolizes something profound in God's ministry and presence in the world.

The ordinance of Baptism is a symbolic act whereby a person who professes belief in Jesus Christ submits to being immersed in water as a public profession of their faith and a sign to the world that they are a follower of Jesus Christ. The symbolism of baptism mirrors the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going down under the water symbolizes death and burial to our old way of life in the world; and coming up out of the water symbolizes the resurrection to new life that we have been blessed with by Jesus Christ. While there are other methods of baptism that exist in various other Christian denominations which include sprinkling and pouring; the Baptist church practices *immersion* because it is the way in which Jesus Himself was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan river.

Another important distinction in the ordinance of baptism is that we practice what is called *believer's baptism*. That means that we only baptize people who have personally confessed a belief in Jesus Christ for themselves. In many of the biblical stories, what made people ready to be baptized was when they made a personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason, the Baptist church does not baptize infants. Rather, we bless babies and then covenant together with the parents and God-parents to be examples of Christ and provide the nurturing and teaching to help the baby grow up to ultimately one day make their own personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ. There is one instance of re-baptism in the Bible which occurs in Acts 19:1-5 that further supports the necessity of belief in Jesus Christ before baptism.

Believer's baptism is an important doctrine of the church also because we see in scripture how baptism has other degrees of spiritual meaning in the life of a Christian. Baptism also symbolizes that we are a part of the body of Christ, which is the church. It also signifies that we are participants in Christ's suffering; that we have received God's forgiveness; that we have repented of our sins; and that we have committed ourselves to making disciples for Jesus Christ. Regarding this ordinance of baptism, it is important to remember:

- Jesus Himself submitted to being baptized and so should we.
 - Belief in Jesus Christ is essential before being baptized.
 - Baptism is a public profession for us to tell the world that we believe in Jesus Christ.
 - Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - Baptism means that we have chosen to fully associate our lives with Jesus Christ and His church.
 - Immersion is the chosen method of baptism in the Baptist church.
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The Lord's Supper, otherwise known as Communion is an ordinance of the church whereby we remember our Lord Jesus Christ; His death on the cross, and the fact that He is coming back again to judge the world. We know from scripture that Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Supper which he celebrated with the 12 apostles around the time of the Passover. Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and said "*take, eat, this is my body*". Likewise, Jesus then took the cup and gave it to them and said "*drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*" In these acts and with these words, Jesus instituted what we call "The Lord's Supper". When we partake of Communion, we are symbolically participating with and embracing the body and blood of Jesus Christ and all that they mean to the life of a believer. It is no surprise then that Baptism is a pre-requisite before a person may take communion in the Baptist church. Only believers in Jesus Christ can fully participate and commune with Jesus Christ like this.

The two traditional schools of thought regarding Communion are *transubstantiation* and *consubstantiation*. For centuries in the Christian church, theologians have argued over these differing viewpoints. In *transubstantiation*, it is believed that the bread and wine literally are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. This view sees communion as more of a sacrament. In *consubstantiation*, it is believed that the presence of Jesus Christ is with us spiritually in the moment when we partake of the body and blood of Christ. Since we see communion as an ordinance, we hold to the doctrine of consubstantiation since the symbolism of the act communicates divine truth to us, but the bread and wine themselves do not have any mystical or supernatural ability to impart grace.

Jesus said as often as we do it, we do it in remembrance of Him. So, communion is an act whereby we remember Jesus Christ, His sacrificial death that He died for us, and that He is coming back again. Some churches may do it monthly, weekly, or even annually, but what is important is that it is done in remembrance of Jesus. Another important part of communion is the self-examination that every Christian should do before partaking. It is a time for us to look at ourselves and see our own faults and failings and ask God's forgiveness. In this way, we are taking Jesus' body and blood seriously and not taking it for granted. Jesus paid it all for us, and all to Him we owe!

